



State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations
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NEWS RELEASE

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Rhode Island Submits Race to the Top Proposal to the U.S. Department of Education *State Seeks \$125 million to Help Transform Education*

Imagine how a one-time infusion of \$125 million could transform education in Rhode Island.
Imagine an education system in which:

- every classroom has highly effective teachers;
- every school has a highly effective principal;
- teachers and community members have access to user-friendly data systems to improve instruction; and
- teachers benefit from excellent professional-development programs.

This is the vision set forth in the Rhode Island Race to the Top proposal that the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education submitted today (Tuesday, January 19th) to the U.S. Department of Education (ED). The proposal seeks approximately \$125 million over four years to increase student achievement, close achievement gaps between student groups, increase the high-school graduation rate, and increase college enrollment.

Yesterday (January 18th) the Rhode Island American Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals, one of the two statewide teachers unions, and the Providence Teachers Union, announced their support for the proposal.

“For the past seven years, our unwavering commitment to innovation and improvement in education positions us well today to participate in the Race to the Top competitive-grant opportunity,” said Governor Donald L. Carcieri. “Rhode Island is considered a national leader in education reform, particularly in common core standards and assessments, commitment to student achievement in our urban schools and closing performance gaps, support for the expansion of charter schools, and comprehensive strategies to ensure educator excellence. Each of these reform initiatives has been identified as a key factor for states to compete for Race to the Top funds. These funds will allow us to accelerate the great work we have already started and provide our children and our educators with the tools they need to ensure all our students excel and are prepared for higher education and the workforce. I would like to extend my appreciation to all those who participated in the application process, especially Commissioner Gist and the RIDE staff, the Board of Regents, and our education partners throughout the state.”

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“We believe that our Race to the Top proposal is extremely competitive, thanks to the many reforms that the Governor, the Regents, and Commissioner Gist have initiated,” said Robert G. Flanders, Jr., Esq., Chairman of the Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education. “These funds could provide us with an enormous resource for our students, our schools, and our community. We are eager to work together with educators across the state to advance learning for all students.”

“Race to the Top presents us with an opportunity not only to secure needed resources to help us carry out reforms but also to push ourselves to act boldly and purposefully to enact the changes that our students need now,” said Commissioner Gist. “Every student in our state deserves a great school supported by excellent teachers, a strong leader, and an involved community. Race to the Top will help us transform education so that every student can achieve at high levels and make a difference in the world as a prepared citizen.”

Among specific initiatives included in the Race to the Top proposal are:

- work in partnership with other states to develop a common set of high-quality, internationally benchmarked standards and tests that will get students ready for college and careers;
- share data with colleges and universities to better determine whether high-school graduates are prepared for success in college;
- develop a model to measure and use student growth as the primary component in determining the effectiveness of teachers and principals;
- use evaluations to improve professional development opportunities, create incentives for highly effective educators, and provide information to support decisions on renewal, tenure, and dismissal of educators;
- attract more high-performing charter schools and continue to support innovative charters and other schools; and
- expand options for recruiting and training highly effective teachers and principals to work in the lowest-achieving schools in the state.

The Obama administration has dedicated \$4.35 billion to the Race to the Top initiative; ED will award funds to states on a competitive basis. Today (January 19th) is the deadline for submitting proposals for the first round of funding, and the Secretary of Education will announce the awards in April. ED will accept applications for a second round of competitive funding by a June 1st deadline for states not funded in this initial round.

As part of the Rhode Island proposal submitted today, 33 (of 36) school districts and all of the charter schools and state-operated schools in the state have signed on to be “participating districts,” which will receive significant amounts of the funds and will work with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (RIDE) to develop a work plan for school reform and innovation. One other district supported the proposal as an “involved” district, which does not guarantee funding from the grant.

“We have been so pleased with the overwhelming support across the state for this application,” Commissioner Gist said. “My greatest hope is that we can come together as a state to support an ambitious agenda that stops at nothing short of excellence for every child.

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“We are grateful to have the support of the state’s single largest local labor union, the Providence Teachers Union. Their commitment to be a partner in this effort is a tremendous benefit to the students of Providence,” Commissioner Gist said. “We have worked with labor statewide throughout this process, and will continue to do so as we reform the education system on behalf of our students.”

The Foster Teachers Union, of the National Education Association – Rhode Island, has signed a memorandum of understanding in support of the proposal.

To seek input and advice during the drafting of the Race to the Top proposal, Commissioner Gist held five public forums, which nearly 500 people attended, and she met with numerous groups of educators, parents, and students. She also convened a steering committee to provide guidance throughout the development of the application, and she made a draft of the application available last week for public comment and feedback.

Several foundations have provided support to help RIDE prepare the application, including The Rhode Island Foundation, the Nellie Mae Education Foundation, the Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

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